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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [ET](#) [SO](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: PRIME MINISTER OUTLINES SOMALIA  
STRATEGY, OPPOSITION HIGHLIGHTS DOMESTIC PROBLEMS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY. In a June 28 address to Parliament, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles highlighted successes in Somalia, stressing that the upcoming National Reconciliation Congress (NRC), anticipated African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) expansion, and enhanced security for Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) would soon allow Ethiopia to finalize its troop withdrawal from Somalia. British Ambassador told us that Prime Minister Meles said privately that Ethiopian troop withdrawal could occur by the end of the summer. Meles reaffirmed Ethiopia's commitment to the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC) decision but warned Eritrea that while Ethiopia wants a peaceful and sustainable demarcation of the border (which includes a dialogue on the fundamental differences which divide the two countries), Ethiopia is prepared to repulse Eritrean military attacks. On domestic politics, Meles praised the National Electoral Board (NEB) process, judicial reform, civil service reform, and good governance efforts.

¶2. (SBU) During the questioning period, opposition MPs focused on domestic problems, noting high inflation and low salaries. The opposition parties criticized the procedures for selection of new NEB commissioners as arbitrary. They termed the ruling party's passage of bills as "dictatorial" and bemoaned the EPRDF's failure to secure consensus on issues. They criticized the Prime Minister for not having an exit strategy for Somalia, and questioned why Ethiopia had to pay a heavy price in Somalia when addressing domestic problems were so critical. Meles, own party criticized him about rumors of a possible release of the opposition CUD detainees, saying it undercut due process when the courts found the detainees guilty of breaking the law.

¶3. (C) Unlike his previous appearance before the Parliament in March 2007 to discuss the budget (when he criticized the opposition and provided brief answers), the Prime Minister went into detail on domestic challenges and spent a great deal of time explaining the detainee issue. He said the judicial process had to take its course through the deliberation and sentencing of the detainees, and that release of the detainees should only be addressed after the courts had completed its procedures. The Prime Minister also criticized the Ambassadors who gave the detainees false hope that they could circumvent the constitution and secure the

release of the detainees. Foreign embassies could express their views, but could not change judicial procedures. Finally, the Prime Minister stressed his commitment to help lower inflation and support government employees facing financial hardship. END SUMMARY.

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PRIME MINISTER FOCUSES ON SOMALIA, COMMENTS ON ERITREA  
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¶4. (SBU) The Prime Minister delivered a forty-minute speech on June 28 on the government's progress in Somalia and on some domestic issues, specifically political reform and the economy. He provided a hopeful picture of Ethiopian troops leaving Somalia in the near future. The Prime Minister noted that extremists' activities and Ethiopia's "errors" in "trusting" some Somali clan elders too much or not working closely enough with them, had forced a delay in executing the third and final phase of withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia. The Prime Minister said this had been corrected, through the military operations in Mogadishu and closer coordination with the clan elders. He expressed hope that the NRC would take place, help resolve clan problems, and bring Somalia together. AMISOM needed to be expanded, and the Prime Minister called on donor countries to fulfill their pledges. He was hopeful that more AMISOM troops would arrive, enhancing the security of the TFG.

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ETHIOPIA EXPECTS EXPEDITIOUS COMPLETION OF TROOP WITHDRAWAL  
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¶5. (SBU) The Prime Minister reaffirmed the GOE's commitment

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to the EEBC decision and to a peaceful and sustainable demarcation of the border with Eritrea. He stressed that dialogue to resolve the fundamental differences that divide the two countries was essential to ensure that demarcation would succeed. Meles criticized Eritrea for sponsoring instability in the region directed towards Ethiopia. Ethiopia was committed to peace but was also prepared to repel any armed attack from Eritrea.

¶6. (SBU) Meles commented on the progress of political reform, calling processes to reform the National Electoral Board and press laws as moving the country in the right democratic direction. He called for capacity building, better recruitment and training procedures, and improving the skills and knowledge of the civil service. This would help enhance operational effectiveness of the government.

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OPPOSITION FOCUSES ON DOMESTIC ISSUES  
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¶7. (SBU) Chairman of the opposition United Ethiopian Democratic Front (UEDF), Dr. Beyene Petros, focused on inflation and the need to raise salaries of civil servants. On Somalia, he and other opposition leaders, like the Coalition for Unity and Democracy's (CUD) Temesken Zewdie and Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) leader Bulcha Demeksa, questioned why Ethiopia had to pay such a heavy price for peace in Somalia when challenges at home were so pressing. Bulcha added his personal criticism, questioning why Ethiopia was working with the U.S. on actions in Somalia, and asking what the U.S. had provided Ethiopia (in return), if anything. Beyene noted that political reform and good governance had to be addressed. He said the opposition was ready to participate in the NEB discussions but opposed the procedures used to appoint new board members. The opposition questioned the press law and broadcast law as legislation in need of serious review. Temesken and one of his colleagues called Meles and the ruling EPRDF "dictatorial" in their actions: failing to gain consensus on issues and instead taking unilateral decisions.

¶8. (SBU) A ruling EPRDF parliamentarian questioned the Prime Minister on rumors that the detained opposition party leaders (convicted on June 11 of subversion) would soon be released. He questioned why the Prime Minister would circumvent the judicial process when the courts had found the detainees guilty. He called on the Prime Minister to respect due process and the laws of Ethiopia.

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MELES OUTLINES THE CHALLENGES  
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¶9. (SBU) Meles provided a detailed response to opposition questions, without the dismissive criticism he showed during his last appearance in the Parliament on the budget (March 29). Meles explained that inflation in the capital had fallen slightly, but that controlling inflation remained a top priority for the government. Acknowledging that salaries had not kept pace, he said there was an urgent need to address the salary disparity of civil servants. He noted that the government was not firing civil servants through its reductions in force; his goal was to improve efficiency, raise quality, and lower government cost. The Prime Minister also said unemployment would be addressed through economic reform and boosting economic growth.

¶10. (SBU) Meles stressed that his government was committed to good governance. He said his government had fostered consensus, listening to the opposition and taking their views into consideration. He criticized opposition MPs for not using the "opposition day" and "questioning of the Prime Minister," as they had the right to do. He also criticized the opposition for walking out of NEB deliberations. They were welcome to return to discussions but had to commit to debate the issues and not walk out again. The Prime Minister concluded that when a vote was necessary, the majority vote must prevail; and this must be respected. He questioned

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which country allowed its parliament not to respect or observe a majority vote on issues. Agreeing on issues only through consensus would lead to delay and lack of results. There comes a time, the Prime Minister noted, when majority vote will move an issue forward.

¶11. (SBU) The Prime Minister went into detail on the troubles in the Ogaden (in Ethiopia's Somali Region). While he blamed Eritrea for fostering extremist activities, Meles focused on his efforts to reach out to the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) as well as to the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in the Oromo area. The GOE would negotiate with rebel groups, ignore past problems, and even absolve criminal acts of violence, if such groups committed to observe the constitution and renounce violence. Thus far, these rebel groups had not committed to these conditions and had elected violence, he said.

¶12. (SBU) On detained opposition leaders, Meles made it clear that the judicial process would be respected and that no outside influence would sway the work of the courts. He criticized foreign Ambassadors and missions for conveying false hope to the detainees that they would be released. The actions of the foreign ambassadors had been unhelpful, wrong and "shameful". Any discussion of clemency or pardon could not occur until after the court had finished its procedures.

¶13. (SBU) Finally, Meles said the U.S. did not provide assistance for activities in Somalia, but did provide other assistance which was appreciated and noted, such as food aid and other assistance. He reaffirmed that Ethiopian troops would depart Somalia and that the government was focused on resolving domestic challenges.

¶14. (S/NF) COMMENT. British Ambassador Bob Dewar told the Ambassador that during a private meeting, Prime Minister

Meles said that Ethiopian troops would withdraw from Somalia by the end of the summer. The cost of operations was far too high to maintain troops there for long. Ethiopia received no financial support, and it had other obligations as well, such as training TFG troops and civil servants, thus far at Ethiopia's expense.

¶15. (C) The clear message on the detainees was for the foreign embassies to refrain from making any comments or to involve itself in Ethiopia's judicial process. While decision on release has been made, the emphasis is that this is an Ethiopian process and that foreign Embassies should remain respectful of the process. END COMMENT.  
YAMAMOTO